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BUMSTED, J. M. — *Lord Selkirk: A Life*. Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 2008, Pp. 517.

The promotional materials for this book state that it is the culmination of three decades of research — the definitive biography of Selkirk. It is a great read, irrespective of the research time invested or the publisher's assessment. J. M. Bumsted has brought into being a biographical projection of Selkirk's life that we can only hope will be imitated by other writers on other "lives," so that biographical historical scholarship will be elevated to greater heights of intelligibility, accuracy, and integrity. He is also a great storyteller.

Past biographical portraits of Selkirk have examined the treatment of him by the nascent Canadian judiciary on account of the actions he took against the North West Company (NWC) after the company's harassment of the Red River settlers. These works usually leave it up to the reader to decide the fairness of justice meted out to Selkirk. Other works on Selkirk portray the man as a sideline contributor to the Scottish Enlightenment who concerned himself with putting into action the ideas of Adam Smith, David Hume, and others. Bumsted himself contributed earlier in his career to this angle on Selkirk in his introduction to *The Collected Writings of Lord Selkirk*. In that two-volume work, Selkirk is portrayed as wanting to assist his "struggling fellow man" by using immigration schemes: in Prince Edward Island, in Upper Canada, and — his last and most ambitious scheme — in Red River.

What I found fascinating in *Lord Selkirk: A Life* is the insight it gives into what may be a rather modern perspective of Selkirk's maturation into a philanthropic businessman and his role in the earliest corporate takeover on what becomes Canadian soil: the Hudson's Bay Company's (HBC) takeover of the NWC. I think the maturation of Selkirk quite naturally began when he married Miss Jean Wedderburn in the late fall of 1807, after a rather short courtship (pp. 165–166). The new Lady Selkirk was well connected, and Selkirk's new in-laws clearly had an influence upon him. Lady Selkirk was the sister of Andrew Wedderburn, who was a well-known and well-regarded capitalist, trader, and merchant in London.

In late 1808, Alexander Mackenzie used Selkirk as a front to purchase stock in the HBC at a time when it was at a very low price (p. 172). Andrew Wedderburn was told of this aspect of Selkirk's business and looked into the situation. In the circumstances, he offered insight and guidance on the HBC stock purchases. What he clearly saw was that Alexander Mackenzie was trying to take over the HBC by bringing under his control a majority of shares bought at an under-valued price. However, Wedderburn may have also realized that the rights and privileges that the HBC enjoyed under its 1670 Charter would allow for the possibility of other business and colonial endeavours. It is probable that Wedderburn was a primary influence and strategist for realizing Selkirk's desire to establish the Red River settlement (p. 186). Selkirk would have realized the advantages of securing the land for settlement using the property rights of the HBC under the Charter.

Selkirk conceived of, and then created, the Red River colony, through his discussions with the British government in 1806, the granting of Assiniboia in

1809, and the first landing of settlers in 1812. These are some of the several fascinating aspects of *A Life*, as well as the many aspects depicted in the book that revolve around, or are connected to, the clash in June 1816 between the settlers and the Métis that took place at Seven Oaks, just north of the Assiniboine River on the west side of the Red River.

After the incident at Seven Oaks, Selkirk got what he wished for: a Commission of Inquiry mandated by the Imperial government. The commission was chaired by William Coltman. In the report, delivered to the Imperial government in 1818, Coltman described the reason the NWC had a powerful presence in British North America, despite not enjoying any legal right to being on Rupert's Land, "but arising from a junction of Capital and connection which has hitherto enabled them to overwhelm all Competition" (p. 58).

The "capital and connections" that empowered the NWC come into view when Bumsted turns to Lord Selkirk's relationship with the courts of Upper and Lower Canada (pp. 359–397). It is clear that Selkirk's treatment by the courts in British North America was filled with procedural and evidentiary curiosities that did not come into being without interventions by powerful sources. Corporate anger and indignation as embodied by the NWC at the time proved a very powerful source. The final evolution in the HBC-NWC relationship was the takeover and amalgamation of the two rivals by the HBC, although many commentators, both contemporary and modern, have twisted themselves in knots trying to describe this final evolution in all kinds of other ways. The outcome was that the HBC survived, and the NWC disappeared as a corporate entity.

It was Andrew Wedderburn (changed to "Colville," thanks to a peerage) who came up with the scheme to change the fur trade in British North America, eliminating the NWC. Colville was also an executor of Selkirk's estate, for Selkirk died on April 8, 1820. Colville orchestrated the takeover of the NWC and introduced a new business scheme for the fur trade. Moreover, Colville put in place its next grand character, George Simpson, who was made governor of the HBC in North America, while Colville became governor of the HBC. These historical outcomes can be seen in fascinating and evolving detail in Bumsted's outstanding historical biography of Selkirk.

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Office of the Federal Interlocutor for Métis and Non-status Indians

CALICHMAN, Richard (ed.) — *Overcoming Modernity: Cultural Identity in Wartime Japan*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2008. Pp. 227.

Since the rise of post-colonialism and the critique of Eurocentrism in the 1990s, scholars have increasingly questioned the significance of European modernity. A recent example of this trend is Dipesh Chakrabarty's well-received book *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), which criticizes Eurocentric